

## CHAPTER IV

### EXPRESSING THE TAO (WAY): CHINESE ART AND LITERATURE

The basic attitude of the Chinese toward art and literature—and aesthetics generally—may be found in Liu Hsieh's *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*. Although focused primarily on literature (*wen*) in the narrow sense, Liu's highly influential book was ultimately concerned with literature as a reflection of the fundamental pattern or principle of the universe (*tao*). As he states in his first chapter, entitled "On Tao, the Source": "*Wen*, or pattern, is a very great power indeed. It is born together with heaven and earth. Why do we say this? Because all color-patterns are mixed of black and yellow [i.e., the colors of heaven and earth], and all shape-patterns are differentiated by round and square [i.e., the shapes of heaven and earth]. The sun and moon, like two pieces of jade, manifest the pattern of heaven; mountains and rivers in their beauty display the pattern of earth. These are, in fact, the *wen* of *tao* itself. . . . Man . . . [together with *yin* and *yang*] forms the Great Trinity [of heaven, earth, and man], and he does so because he alone is endowed with spirituality. He is the refined essence of the five elements—indeed, the mind of the universe."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout much of his book, Liu Hsieh draws upon the *I-ching* for inspiration, illustrations, and explanations. But his esteem for all the classics is unmistakable: "The works dealing with the universal principles of the Great Trinity . . . are known as *ching* [classics]. By *ching* we mean an expression of the absolute or constant *tao* or principle, that great teaching which is unalterable. . . . The classics help to articulate the order of things and to set up the rules governing human affairs. In them is found both the secret of nature and spirit and the very bone and marrow of fine literature. . . . Here are principles which are absolute in regard to human nature and emotions, and here is language which conforms to the best literary principles."<sup>2</sup>

Liu's message is that the *tao* of literature (and we may add music and

the arts), is inseparable from the *tao* of human affairs as a whole. The corollary is that ancient models of artistic expression and moral conduct have universal and transcendent value.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Frederic Mote has pointed out, there seems to be an anomaly in Chinese civilization regarding attitudes toward the past. On the one hand, "the defining criteria for value were inescapably governed by past models, not by present experience or by future states of existence." On the other, "the entire purpose of civilization and men's individual lives was to realize the maximum from this present moment, not to blindly repeat some past nor to forego the present for some anticipated future." Mote quite correctly explains the anomaly by reference to the nature of ultimate authority in China. In China's "Great Tradition," he writes, "neither individuals nor the state could claim any theoretical authority higher or more binding than men's rational minds and the civilizing norms that those human minds had created. That is a tenuous basis of authority, and since it could not easily be buttressed by endowing it with nonrational or superrational qualities, it had to be buttressed by the weight granted to historical experience."<sup>4</sup> In other words, "the Chinese past had to become greater than the Chinese present in order for the accumulated wisdom of human civilization to impose its guiding function, to keep the all-important present on the track."

The relationship between past and present in Chinese art and literature can be cast in terms of other polarities, such as tradition and innovation, orthodoxy and individualism, structure and spontaneity, intellect and intuition, even didactics and aesthetics. But however the tensions were viewed, and however they were resolved, the past in Chinese intellectual and imaginative endeavor remained an integral part of the Chinese present.

How was the link established? In a general sense, the aim was the "restoration of antiquity" (*fu-ku*), a fundamental neo-Confucian concern, and an obsession with many Ch'ing intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> But the restoration of the past did not mean simply the slavish imitation of early literary and artistic models. Rather it involved "spiritual communication" (*shen-hui*) with the ancient masters, a state in which the past and present became one in the mind of the creative individual. The greater the aesthetic or technical achievement of a Chinese writer or artist, the more he was thought to be in touch with the past—at once under its command and in command of it.<sup>6</sup> Such spiritual communication required a total commitment on the part of the individual, body and mind.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese tradition thus suggested pattern, but it did not impose rule.<sup>8</sup> The result was a remarkable continuity of cultural style without the sacrifice of creative potential. In the words of Wen Fong, "in *fu-ku* the Chinese saw history not as a long fall from grace, but as an enduring crusade to restore life and truth to art."<sup>9</sup> That crusade gave vitality to Chinese culture in every period, not least during the Ch'ing.



The unity of cultural style in China can be seen in the language of artistic and literary criticism. Terms such as *ch'i* (life spirit or force), *ku* ("bone" or structure), and *shen-yün* (spirit and tone or spiritual resonance) were long-standing and indispensable in discussions of both art and literature—although each expression might have several connotations, even when used by the same critic.<sup>10</sup> Several common evaluative terms were borrowed directly from the *I-ching*, and many more were derived from *yin-yang* concepts.<sup>11</sup> During the Ch'ing, a number of technical expressions from Chinese painting found their way into the vocabulary of narrative prose criticism, including "painting the cloud to bring the moon into relief" (pretending to write about one thing when intending to describe something else); "clouds cutting the mountain in halves" (introducing a new incident into the narrative for variety); and "thin wash for nearby mountains, light outlines for distant trees" (patterns of texture within a narrative).<sup>12</sup> These and other such terms reflect a Chinese aesthetic based on the thematic importance of life, vitality, and natural process, and on the structural importance of rhythm, balance, and the alternation of themes and ideas.

Chinese art and literature also shared a common set of symbols, many of which were derived from the classical canon (again, especially the *I-ching*). In late imperial times, plant and animal symbolism, and the more abstract symbolism of natural process, occupied a prominent place in both art and literature, but philosophical, religious, and mythological associations might be attached to even the most mundane naturalistic symbols. Like Chinese characters, Chinese symbols seldom had a single, fixed meaning, and context was therefore everything. Not surprisingly, many symbols were juxtaposed in *yin-yang* fashion. The dragon, for example, was a *yang* symbol, representing the emperor, heavenly power, majesty, and benevolence; the phoenix was the *yin* equivalent—powerful and positive, but distinctly female. Illustrative of the complexity of even the most rudimentary Chinese symbolism, both animals were composite creatures, and each carried a wide variety of symbolic correlations and associations, some of which were *yin*, and others, *yang*. The dragon, for instance, was associated not only with heaven and mountains (both *yang*), but also with earth and water (both *yin*); the phoenix, although a *yin* symbol, was also associated with the sun and warmth (*yang*).<sup>13</sup>

By and large, philosophical, religious, and mythological symbols tended to be most prominent in literature, while naturalistic symbols were more prominent in art. The reason is that much of Chinese literature was explicitly moralistic and didactic in ways that most of Chinese art was not. It is true, however, that for much of the imperial era, and certainly during Ch'ing times, Chinese artists avoided gruesome scenes of rape, war, and death, figure painters shunned the nude, and landscape painters ignored the artistic possibilities of deserts, swamps, and other desolate places. If

Chinese art was not in the main didactic, it was nonetheless unquestionably decorous.<sup>14</sup>

In the space of a few pages, we can hardly hope to evaluate China's glorious artistic and literary tradition; nor can we even give due notice to the Ch'ing dynasty's concerted effort to preserve that heritage in collections such as the monumental *Ssu-k'u ch'uan-shu* (Complete Library of the Four Treasuries) in 36,000 volumes.<sup>15</sup> We can, however, focus on two key areas of literary and artistic achievement that seem to reflect most clearly the fundamental features of Chinese culture we have been discussing.

Let us begin with poetry. From earliest times, poetry has been a central cultural concern of the Chinese. The *Shih-ching* (Book of Poetry), one of the five major Confucian classics, is generally considered to be the most important single work in China's entire literary history.<sup>16</sup> Confucius once said, "If you do not learn the *Shih-ching* you will not be able to converse"; and again, "[One's character is] elevated by poetry, established by ritual, and completed by music."<sup>17</sup> Virtually every major type of Chinese literature, from the classics and histories to plays and novels, included substantial amounts of poetry; and few self-respecting gentlemen in Ch'ing times lacked the ability to compose elegant verse rapidly, in any social circumstance. Contrary to the misleading stereotype of Ch'ing "cultural stagnation," the period witnessed a revival of several major poetic forms, including regulated verse (*lü-shih*) and lyric verse (*tz'u*).<sup>18</sup>

We have discussed how well-suited the classical Chinese language was for poetic expression. Even ordinary prose had an evocative, ambiguous, rhythmic quality. Poetry—which as a generic category should include not only the various types of *shih* and lyric verse, but also "song-poems" (*ch'ü*) and rhymed prose (*fu*)—gave full scope to the creative potential of the language. The grammatic flexibility of classical Chinese, as well as the multiple meanings and subtle ambiguities of each character, allowed Chinese poets to express a wide range of ideas and emotions with vividness, economy, grace, and power. Grouping elements together in spatial patterns and temporal rhythms, the poet created integrated structures of meaning which, though unified, presented a kaleidoscopic series of impressions.<sup>19</sup> The visual quality of the characters, enhanced by the use of calligraphy as an artistic medium, complemented the tonal and other auditory qualities of the language—all of which were exploited to great advantage in poetry. Furthermore, Chinese poetry never lost its intimate relationship with music; even when the musical context for lyrics had been forgotten, poems were still written to be chanted, not simply read aloud.<sup>20</sup> Unhappily, the visual and auditory effects that contributed so much to the richness of traditional Chinese poetry are invariably lost in translation.<sup>21</sup>

Four main critical views of Chinese poetry have been distinguished: those of the Technicians, Moralists, Individualists (or Expressionists), and



Intuitionists.<sup>22</sup> Although these designations do not imply the existence of four distinct and mutually exclusive schools of literary criticism, they do suggest certain tendencies in the thinking of poets and literary critics during the late imperial period of Chinese history.

The Technicians, as their name implies, viewed poetry primarily as a literary exercise. Their outlook was traditionalistic and frankly imitative, although rationalized on grounds that the principles of poetry embodied in the work of the great masters were, in effect, natural laws of rhythm and euphony. In the words of the Ch'ing critic Weng Fang-kang (1733-1818): "The fundamental principles of poetic methods do not originate with oneself; they are like rivers flowing into the sea, and one must trace their sources back to the ancients. As for the infinitely varied applications of poetic methods, from such major considerations as the structural principles down to such details as the grammatical nature of a word, the tone of a syllable, and the points of continuation, transition, and development—all these one must learn from the ancients. Only so can one realize that everything is done according to rules and in consonance with the laws of music and that one cannot do as one likes to the slightest degree."<sup>23</sup>

This technical view of poetry placed a premium on ancient models, but it also encouraged creative stylistic manipulations, such as taking apart the characters in one line of a poem and reconstituting them to form new characters in another (*li-ho*), or composing verses that could be read from top to bottom or bottom to top with different meaning but equal clarity (*hui-wen*).<sup>24</sup> Technicians also enjoyed composing poems consisting of "collected lines" (*chi-chü*) taken from past poems composed by different writers. Chu I-tsun (1629-1709) provides an example:

Soft colored clouds obscured by the sun;  
Red upon red, green upon green, flowers in the park;  
How can I enhance this fine poetic feeling?  
Listen to the spring birds:  
After they've flown, the flowering branches still dance gratefully.

These lines are taken, respectively, from the poetry of Wang Wei, Wang Chien, Ssu-k'ung T'u, Ku K'uang, and Wei Ying-wu.<sup>25</sup>

Many types of Chinese verse had a highly formal structure, requiring careful attention to the number of lines, the number of characters in a line, the matching of tones, rhyme, and parallelism or antithesis. Antithesis was, of course, especially admired. It appeared not only in regulated verse (where it was required), four-character verse, and ancient verse (*ku-shih*), but also in lyric verse and "song-poems," which often did not even have lines of equal length. In the best antithetical couplets, each character in the first line contrasted in tone with the corresponding character in the second. At the same time, ideally the contrasted words had the same grammatical function

in each line, and referred to the same categories of things. Again we may call on Chu I-tsun for illustration:

Birds become frightened when the mountain moon sets;  
Trees stand still when the valley wind dies.  
When the monastery drum rolls through the deep forest,  
The hermit monks have already prepared their meal.<sup>26</sup>

Traditional handbooks on poetry gave detailed lists of categories of objects for use in antithesis, including astronomy, geography, plants, and animals. In the hands of unskilled poets, this technique could degenerate into a mere mechanical pairing of words, but when employed by the masters it became a vivid expression of *yin-yang* reconciliation of opposites. The modern critic James J. Y. Liu explains the method: "At its best [antithesis] can reveal a perception of the underlying contrasting aspects of Nature and simultaneously strengthen the structure of the poem. The perfect antithetical couplet is natural, not forced, and though the two lines form a sharp contrast, they yet somehow seem to possess a strange affinity, like two people of opposite temperaments happily married, so that one might remark of the couplet, as of the couple, 'What a contrast, yet what a perfect match!'"<sup>27</sup>

The didactic view of poetry shared with the technical view a concern with tradition, and many Ch'ing writers, such as Shen Te-ch'ien (1673-1769), could be described as technicians as well as moralists.<sup>28</sup> But the fundamental purpose of poetry in the minds of the moralists was self-cultivation and, by extension, the betterment of society. Shen Te-ch'ien wrote, for example: "Poetry can regulate one's nature and emotion, and improve human relationships"; and again, "To use what is poetic in poetry is commonplace; it is only when you quote from the classics, the histories, and the philosophers in poetry that you can make it different from wild and groundless writings."<sup>29</sup> An extreme but effective example of didacticism can be found in the following poem written by the K'ang-hsi emperor to his son, the heir apparent, Yin-jeng:

The Sage gave his family instructions  
To draw learning from the *Songs* [i.e., *Shih-ching*] and the rituals;  
Countries differ from families  
But learning is one.

.....  
As Yü the Great treasured each moment,  
So must you value time in its passing.  
Learn from the Ancients in each book you open,  
Seek inner meanings of every occurrence.  
Over time, your heart will find joy,  
Just as each kind of food reveals its beauty.<sup>30</sup>

Individualist poets were not bereft of such sentiments, but they did not view poetry as primarily a didactic exercise. Rather, they saw it as an expression of the unfettered self. As the famous Ch'ing poet Yüan Mei (1716-1797) put it: "Poetry is what expresses one's nature and emotion. It is enough to look no further than one's self (for the material of poetry). If its words move the heart, its colors catch the eye, its taste pleases the mouth, and its sound delights the ear, then it is good poetry."<sup>31</sup> Such diverse individuals as Yüan, his literary arch enemy Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng and the noted "New Text" (*chin-wen*) scholar Kung Tzu-ch'en shared these individualist sentiments.<sup>32</sup>

Individualist poetry covered a wide range of emotional territory. Common topics included friendship and drinking, romantic love, homesickness and parting, history and nostalgia, leisure and nature.<sup>33</sup> Nature themes were especially esteemed. Chao I (1727-1814) conveys the Taoist ideal:

I never tire in my search for solitude;  
I wander aimlessly along out-of-the-way trails  
Where I have never been before.  
The more I change my direction, the wilder the road becomes.  
Suddenly I come to the bank of a raging river;  
The path breaks off, all trails vanish.  
No one is there for me to ask directions:  
Only a lone egret beside the tall grass, glistening white.

Huang Ching-jen (1749-1783) writes:

This idiotic me is left alone to enjoy this solitude,  
While boatmen call one another through the mist.  
My boat adrift, on which bank of the river shall I sleep tonight?  
I can only paddle towards more fragrant waters.<sup>34</sup>

The intuitionists, perhaps best represented by Wang Shih-ch'en (1634-1711) and Wang Fu-chih (1619-1692), dealt with many of the themes of the individualists, but they advocated a more intuitive apprehension of reality (*miao-wu*). Their poetry was concerned with the relationship between human emotion (*ch'ing*) and external scene (*ching*). "Although *ch'ing* and *ching* are two in name, they are inseparable in reality. In the most inspired poetry they subtly join together, with no barrier. Good poets include *ching* in *ch'ing* and *ch'ing* in *ching*." Further on, Wang Fu-chih writes: "Emotion is the activity of *yin* and *yang*, and things [*wu*] are the products of heaven and earth. When the activity between *yin* and *yang* takes place in the mind [*hsin*], there are things produced by heaven and earth to respond to it from the outside. Thus, things that exist on the outside can have an internal counterpart in emotion; and where there is emotion on the inside there must be the external object [to match it]."<sup>35</sup>



The intuitionists attempted, in other words, to identify the self with the object of contemplation in order to establish a form of "spiritual resonance" (*shen-yün*). Although criticized by individualists such as Yüan Mei for lacking genuine emotion, poets such as Wang Shih-chen actually sought a deeper spiritual awareness, an appreciation of the interrelatedness of all things, animate and inanimate. They were concerned not simply with self-expression, but with conveying a world view.<sup>36</sup> We get a hint of this attitude in Wang's "Moonlight Night at Fragrant Mountain Temple":

The bright moon appears from the east ridge,  
And the summits become still all at once.  
Melting snow still covers the ground,  
Lying in shadow before the western lodge.  
The hue of bamboos makes the solitude complete,  
As pine shadows bewitch the shimmering ripples.  
All this brilliance shines forth at once—  
A myriad of images all pure and fresh.<sup>37</sup>

But for all that seemed to divide the Technicians, Moralists, Individualists, and Intuitionists, there was considerable creative overlap. We have mentioned the link between Technicians and Moralists as exemplified in Shen Te-ch'ien. But there was other common ground. Individualists such as Kung Tzu-chen, for example, could be highly didactic, while Intuitionists such as Wang Shih-chen paid great attention to style.<sup>38</sup> Shen Te-ch'ien, for his part, stressed the quality of "spiritual resonance" that was so important to Wang, yet he also recognized the merit of "romantic" poets such as Li O (1692-1752), whose writing was characterized by originality and freedom from the stylistic standards of Wang, Chu I-tsun, and others.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the best Ch'ing poets were masters of a variety of styles and moods, as the numerous poems in Arthur Waley's delightful biography of Yüan Mei attest.

By Ch'ing times, and in fact well before, poetry and painting had become inextricably linked as the most exalted forms of elite cultural indulgence. Both were "written" with brush and ink, and like calligraphy itself, both were believed to convey the moral worth of the author. Often, the two were combined in a single artistic work. Both treated a wide variety of subject material, and both were concerned with simplicity and stylistic balance. We can even distinguish in painting the same set of critical views we have described for Chinese poetry, although the lines separating them were perhaps even less clear cut.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, poetry and painting often inspired each other: Painters were moved to create art after reading a poem, and poets were moved to create verse after viewing a painting. Thus, for example, we have Cheng Hsieh (1693-1765) writing the following lines to his contemporary, Pien Wei-ch'i:



You paint the wild geese as if I could see them crying,  
 And on this double-threaded silk, the rustling sound of river reeds.  
 On the tip of your brush, how infinitely chill is the autumn wind;  
 Everywhere on the mountain pass is the sorrow of parting.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, the relationship between painting and poetry is perhaps best expressed in Su Tung-p'o's (1036-1101) famous tribute to Wang Wei (701-761): "There is painting in his poetry and poetry in his painting" (*shih-chung yu-hua hua-chung yu-shih*). Ideally, and very often in fact, the Chinese literatus in Ch'ing times was both a poet and a painter.

Like much of Chinese poetry, painting had to satisfy rather rigid stylistic requirements. These rules were spelled out in a number of painting manuals and critical works such as the famous Ming guide to connoisseurship, *Ko-ku tsung-yao* (Essential Criteria of Antiquities):

The portrait of a Buddhist or a Taoist should have a benign and righteous expression. A portrait should look as though [the person depicted] were about to speak. The folds of his wearing apparel, the trees and the rocks should be painted with strokes similar to those in calligraphy. The folds of dresses should be large, but their rhythm subtle, and the strength of their execution gives the impression that they are fluttering and raised [by the wind]. Trees, with their wrinkled bark and their twists and knots, should show their age. Rocks should be three-dimensional and shading lines used in their depiction should produce a rugged yet mellow effect. A landscape with mountains, water, and woods and springs should present an atmosphere of placidity and vastness and should clearly show the season, the time of day, and the [prevailing] weather. Rising or subsiding mists and clouds should also be depicted. The source whence a river flows as well as its destination should be clearly defined, and the water in it should appear fluent. Bridges and roads should show the way by which people come and go, as narrow paths wind through wildernesses. Houses should face in different directions in order to avoid monotony, fish swim hither and thither, and dragons ascend or descend. Flowers and fruit should bear dew drops on all surfaces and should also indicate in which direction the wind blows. Birds and animals, poised to drink water, to pick food, to move, or to remain still, are captured in spirit, as well as life-like. When a painting satisfies these criteria, it cannot but be the work of a great master.<sup>42</sup>

Painting manuals such as the popular Ch'ing handbook *Chieh-tzu-yüan hua-chuan* (Mustard Seed Garden Manual) provided elaborate instructions on exactly how to paint such subject material—trees, rocks, people, buildings, flowers, bamboo, grass, insects, and animals. The starting point, as in calligraphy, was self-discipline. "You must learn first to observe the rules faithfully," wrote the author-compiler of the *Chieh-tzu-yüan hua-chuan*; then "afterwards modify them according to your intelligence and capacity. The end of all method is to seem to have no method." And again, "If you aim to dispense with method, learn method. If you aim at facility, work hard. If you aim for simplicity, master complexity." One began with the correct mental attitude, learned basic

brushstrokes (sixteen, at first), and then progressed to more sophisticated painting techniques.<sup>43</sup>

An essential part of the artist's training was the study of the ancient masters. There were three main approaches in addition to booklearning: (1) exact reproduction by tracing (*mu*), (2) copying (*lin*), and (3) freely interpreting in the manner of the master (*fang*).<sup>44</sup> The ultimate purpose of this progression was not merely to reproduce outer form but to capture inner essence. The eighteenth-century Ch'ing critic Shen Tsung-ch'ien admonished students: "A student of painting must copy ancient works, just as a man learning to write must study good writing that has come down through the ages. He should put himself in a state of mind to feel as if he were doing the same painting himself. . . . First he should copy one artist, then branch out to copy others and, what is more important, he should feel as if he were breathing through the work himself and should identify himself with what the artist was trying to say." Shen is describing here the effort on the part of the painter to achieve "spiritual communication" (*shen-hui*) with the ancient masters. *Shen-hui*, as Tu Wei-ming has indicated, necessarily involved self-realization. Shen put the matter this way: "the important thing in copying the ancients is that I have my own temperament. If I should forget myself to copy the ancients, I would be doing a disservice to both the ancients and myself. . . . The painter's concern is how to make the art of the brush his own. If this is done, then what I express is only myself, a self which is akin to the ancients."<sup>45</sup>

After rigorous training, the Chinese artist went on to create his own individualized work. Painters seldom painted from life, preferring instead to conjure up and then convey a mental image that bore no necessary relationship to a single reality. These artists were, however, bound by obedience to natural principles, and they generally refused to combine objects except according to their natural habitat and associations.<sup>46</sup> They were also captives of their preferred media. Unlike Western-style oil painting, Chinese ink or watercolor on paper or silk allowed no room for trial and error; once the artist put his brush down he made an irretrievable commitment—especially when using ink on paper. "When the brush touches paper, there are only differences in touch, speed, angle and direction. But a too light touch results in weakness while a too heavy touch causes clumsiness. Too much speed results in a slippery effect, too little speed drags; too much slant [of the tip of the brush] results in thinness; a too perpendicular approach in flatness; a curve may result in ragged edges and a straight line may look like one made with a ruler."<sup>47</sup>

The Chinese artist thus had to have a fairly complete vision of his painting before beginning. Modifications could be made, of course, as the painting developed, but a unified vision was essential: "It would be a great fault," wrote Shen, "to begin a picture without a preconceived plan, and



then add and adjust as one goes along, with the result that the different parts do not have an organic unity. One should rather have a general idea of where the masses and connections, the light and dark areas would be, then proceed so that one part grows out of another and the light and dark areas cooperate to build a picture. Examined closely, each section is interesting in itself; taken together, there is an organic unity."<sup>48</sup>

This idea of organic unity was expressed in the general term *k'ai-ho* (opening and closing, or expanding and contracting). *Kai-ho* can refer to the overall layout of a painting, to the relationship of individual elements within the painting, or to the composition of the individual elements themselves. In a vertical scroll, the lower half represents the "opening up," and the top half the "closing." In each part of the painting, including each individual object, the artist must consider beginning, ending, and beginning again. Shen Tsung-ch'ien explains: "The combined work of brush and ink depends on force of movement [*shih*]. This force refers to the movement of the brush back and forth on the paper, which carries with it and in it the opening [*k'ai*] and closing [*ho*] movements. Where something is starting up, that is the opening movement, but with every opening movement the artist must be thinking how it will be gathered up at the end. . . . The gathering up is called the closing movement, and with each closing movement the artist is already thinking where the next growth is going to arise. Thus there is always the suggestion of further development."<sup>49</sup>

*Yin-yang* ideas such as *k'ai-ho* are essential to an appreciation of Chinese painting. Ch'ing handbooks and critical works repeatedly drew upon the concept of *yin-yang* complementarity to explain composition and brushstroke as well as symbolism. Artists were encouraged to dip downward before going up; to turn upwards before going down; to intersperse sparse with dense and dark with light; to relieve thick ink with thin; to counteract the convex with the concave, and so forth. In landscape, "host" mountains required "guest" mountains, exalted trees required humble trees, luxuriant foliage required at least some dead branches.<sup>50</sup> In its most extreme form, the notion of *yin-yang* complementarity in painting was expressed in a kind of Taoist paradox: "When in your eyes you have mountains, only then can you make trees; when in your mind there is water, only then can you make mountains."<sup>51</sup> The term for landscape itself (*shan-shui*; literally, mountains and water) suggests a basic *yin-yang* relationship.

The point of *yin-yang* juxtaposition in Chinese art was not merely to create contrast, however. Rather, it was to indicate "life movement" (*sheng-tung*), nature's rhythm (*yiin*). Chinese artists attempted to reproduce in their brushwork the rise and fall, expansion and contraction of *yin-yang*, and in so doing come into closer harmony with the rhythm of life itself.<sup>52</sup> Nowhere was this naturalistic impulse more evident than in landscape painting. Not only did the landscape artist avoid perspective in order to let

the viewer wander at will through his painting without a fixed point of view, but he also painted his scene as though it were part of a larger, harmonious whole. The scene was not, in other words, self-contained; rather, it spilled out into all of nature. In a similar way, through *yin-yang* juxtapositions of past and present and other devices, Chinese poets were able to add new dimensions to the world directly perceived in their poems and to evoke a mood of infiniteness. Wang Shih-chen in particular was a master of the poetic "ending which doesn't end."<sup>53</sup> Significantly, this "endless" quality can also be found in the best Chinese narrative literature.<sup>54</sup>

In Ch'ing times, the most esteemed painters were not professionals, but amateurs (*wen-jen*, literally, cultivated men). In the critical writing of the period, a sharp distinction was drawn between the "Northern School" of professional and court painting and the "Southern School" of unprofessional literati painting. The former has been characterized as academic, representational, precise, and decorative art, painted mainly in polychrome and on silk. The latter has been described as spontaneous, free, calligraphic, personal, and subjective, painted mainly in monochrome on paper. It was the Southern School that placed the greatest emphasis on spiritual oneness with nature and the "restoration of antiquity"; but many of the Ch'ing literati seem to have taken the injunction to recover the past too literally. The result, in the words of Michael Sullivan, was that "the free, unfettered styles of the leading Ming literati froze [in Ch'ing times] into a new academicism that has justly been called 'art-historical art.' " Too often, "the artists' inspiration was not nature but the very tradition itself."<sup>55</sup>

Yet Ch'ing art had considerable vitality, especially during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Not only were there the "Six Great Masters of the Early Ch'ing" (Wang Shih-min [1592-1680], Wang Chien [1598-1677], Wang Hui [1632-1717], Wang Yüan-ch'i [1642-1715], Wu Li [1632-1718], and Yün Shou-p'ing [1633-1690])—all painters of the Southern School—but there were also colorful and inventive geniuses such as Chu Ta (1626-c. 1705), Shih-ch'i (c. 1610-c. 1670), and Shih-t'ao (Tao-chi, 1641-c. 1710).<sup>56</sup> For all their individualism and eccentricity, however, the last three, like the "Six Great Masters," acknowledged a debt to "tradition." Shih-t'ao, for example, in his *Hua-yü lu* (Record of Talks on Painting) admitted that for many years he had painted and written, declaring his independence of orthodox methods, only to discover that the way that he had thought was his own was actually "the *tao* of the ancients."<sup>57</sup>

Like poetry, Chinese painting could be expressly didactic,<sup>58</sup> but the most esteemed moral message conveyed by Ch'ing literati painters was simply the greatness of nature's *tao*, the unity of heaven, earth, and man. This oneness could never be portrayed by pictures of angels, gods, or even



sages, but it could be reflected in landscapes. Moreover, landscapes were uplifting not only because of their subject matter, but also because they provided a form of spiritual release for both the artist and the viewer. In the creation or contemplation of a landscape, the world-weary Confucian scholar could find Taoist escape.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES

1. Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, translated by Vincent Shih (New York, 1959), pp. 8-9 (slightly modified).
2. Ibid., pp. 17-18 (slightly modified).
3. For the relationship between music and literature, see *ibid.*, pp. 9, 32, 40, and 182-186.
4. Frederick Mote, "The Arts and the 'Theorizing Mode' of Civilization," in Christian Murck, ed., *Artists and Traditions* (Princeton, 1976), p. 6.
5. See Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, translated by Immanuel Hsü (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 21-27.
6. Mote, "The Arts," p. 7.
7. Tu Wei-ming, "'Inner Experience': The Basis of Creativity in Neo-Confucian Thinking," in Murck, ed., *Artists*.
8. Mote, "The Arts," p. 8.
9. Wen Fong, "Archaism as a 'Primitive' Style," in Murck, ed., *Artists*, p. 93.
10. James J. Y. Liu, "Tradition and Creativity in Early Ch'ing Poetics," in *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
11. See, for example, Richard J. Smith, "An Approach to the Study of Traditional Chinese Culture," *Chinese Culture* 19, no. 2 (June 1978): 63.
12. John C. Y. Wang, "The Chih-yen-chai Commentary and the *Dream of the Red Chamber*: A Literary Study," in Adele Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 209-216.
13. On Chinese symbolism, see Schuyler Cammann, "Types of Symbols in Chinese Art," in Arthur Wright, ed., *Studies in Chinese Thought* (Chicago, 1953); and C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Motives* (Shanghai, 1941), especially pp. 132-141 and 323-325.
14. See, for example, the discussion in Michael Sullivan, "The Heritage of Chinese Art," in Raymond Dawson, ed., *The Legacy of China* (Oxford, 1971).

15. For the mixed motives that lay behind this effort, consult L. C. Goodrich, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-lung* (Baltimore, 1935).

16. Ch'en Shih-hsiang, "The *Shih-ching*: Its Generic Significance in Chinese Literary History and Poetics," in Cyril Birch, ed., *Studies in Chinese Literary Genres* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1974).

17. *Analects (Lun-yü)*, 16:13; *ibid.*, 8:8.

18. Kao Yu-kung and Mei Tsu-lin, "Ending Lines in Wang Shih-ch'en's 'Ch'i-Ch'ieh'," in Murck, ed., *Artists*, p. 131; Chia-ying Yeh Chao, "The Ch'ang-chou School of Tz'u Criticism," in Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches*, p. 151.

19. See Wai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976); Siu-kit Wong, "Ch'ing and Ching in the Critical Writings of Wang Fu-chih," in Rickett, ed., *Chinese Approaches*, especially pp. 137-139; James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago and London, 1966), part 1, chapters 1, 2, and 4; part 3, chapters 2 and 3.

20. Liu Wu-chi and Irving Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor* (New York, 1975), p. xiv.

21. See the discussion in David Hawkes, "Chinese Poetry and the English Reader," in Dawson, *Legacy*, especially pp. 95-114.

22. See Liu, *The Art*, pp. 63-87.

23. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 80.

24. See Liu, *The Literary Mind*, pp. 31ff.

25. Liu and Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor*, pp. 478-479.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

27. Liu, *The Art*, p. 149-150.

28. Liu, "Tradition and Creativity," p. 18.

29. Liu, *The Art*, pp. 65-69.

30. Quoted in Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China* (New York, 1975), p. 117.

31. Quoted in Liu, *The Art*, pp. 70-76.

32. David Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsiieh-ch'eng (1738-1801)* (Stanford, 1966), p. 135; Shirleen Wong, *Kung Tzu-ch'en* (Boston, 1975), pp. 49 and 70-71.

33. Liu and Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor*, pp. xvi-xviii; Liu, *The Art*, pp. 48-60.

34. Liu and Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor*, pp. 491 (Chao) and 493 (Huang).



35. Wang Fu-chih, quoted in Wong, "Ch'ing and Ching," pp. 130-131 and 140 (modified translations).
36. See *ibid.*, especially pp. 130-148; also Liu, *The Art*, pp. 81-87.
37. Liu and Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor*, p. 480.
38. See Wong, *Kung Tzu-chen*, p. 71; Liu, *The Art*, p. 75; Arthur Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D. C., 1943-1944), p. 832.
39. Arthur Waley, *Yüan-Mei* (Stanford, 1970), p. 170; Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 646 and 455.
40. See Murck, ed., *Artists, passim*.
41. Quoted in Liu and Lo, eds., *Sunflower Splendor*, p. 487.
42. Percival David, *Chinese Connoisseurship* (New York and Washington, 1971), pp. 14-15.
43. Mai-Mai Sze, *The Way of Chinese Painting* (New York, 1956), pp. 130-131 and 133-153; cf. Lin Yutang, *The Chinese Theory of Art* (London, 1967), pp. 160ff.
44. Sullivan, *The Arts*, p. 160.
45. Lin, *The Chinese Theory*, pp. 198 and 200. Cf. Tu, "'Inner Experience,'" pp. 10-15.
46. George Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting* (Princeton, 1970), p. 29. Significantly, we find the composite quality of Chinese creative endeavor not only in painting and poetry, but also in narrative. See Plaks, "Towards a Critical Theory," pp. 345-346.
47. Shen Tsung-ch'ien, quoted in Lin, *The Chinese Theory*, p. 165.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.
50. See, for example, Sze, *The Way*, pp. 325-327; Rowley, *Principles*, pp. 50-55; also Lin, *The Chinese Theory*, pp. 174ff.
51. Quoted in Rowley, *Principles*, p. 51.
52. See David Mungello, "Neo-Confucianism and Wen-jen Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophy East and West* 19, no. 4 (October 1969), especially pp. 381-382.
53. Kao and Mei, "Ending Lines," p. 132.
54. Plaks, "Towards a Critical Theory," p. 338.
55. Sullivan, *The Arts*, pp. 216-219 and 233-236.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 238-244.

57. Sze, *The Way*, p. 5.

58. See, for example, David, *Chinese Connoisseurship*, pp. 14-15.

59. See Lin, *The Chinese Theory*, pp. 71-72.